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Written statement* submitted by the Amuta for NGO Responsibility, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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European funding for NGOs that falsify history of the 2014 Gaza war

Throughout the 2014 Gaza war and its aftermath, Israeli, Palestinian, and international political NGOs have been highly active in constructing a highly tendentious account of events, based on false or unverifiable claims and distortions of international law. In hundreds of publications, advertisements, social media campaigns, and flashy interactive graphics, these organizations have almost entirely erased the actions of Hamas and other Palestinian terrorists during the war, ignored the nearly 5,000 missile attacks on Israeli and Palestinian civilians, and proffered a fraudulent narrative accusing Israel of deliberately targeting civilians and other "war crimes." Their allegations have been repeated in the international media and diplomatic frameworks, and were echoed in the UN's report of the Commission of Inquiry into the 2014 Gaza war, without any independent verification, thereby giving credence and credibility to blatantly misleading and false claims.

The most disturbing aspect of this NGO campaign, seeking to erase the role of Hamas and falsifying the history of the Gaza war, is that it is financed with millions of euros, pounds, dollars, and kroner in taxpayer funds provided by the European Union and European member states.

The governments of Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark and the Netherlands are the leading financiers of this effort via the Human Rights and International Law Secretariat ("IHL Secretariat") administered by Bir Zeit University. The IHL Secretariat funds some of the most highly biased and politicized NGOs active in the Arab-Israeli conflict, including many that promote BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) campaigns, advance a "1948 agenda" (rejecting a state of Israel in any form and regardless of boundaries), claim Palestinian terror attacks on civilians are so-called legitimate "resistance," and utilize explicitly antisemitic imagery and language.

The NGOs funded by the IHL Secretariat have been the most active in promoting a false narrative regarding the Gaza war. In addition, these same organizations were prominently featured in the discredited UNHRC Schabas-Davis Report.

With a budget of approximately $13 million (2013-2016), the IHL Secretariat provides "project grants" as well as "core funding" grants to select prequalified organizations. The IHL Secretariat also provided "emergency funding" towards the end of the 2014 conflict, purportedly to document "large scale violations of human rights and international humanitarian law."

The NGOs funded by the IHL Secretariat target Israel almost exclusively. Moreover, these organizations lack the capability to carry out professional and objective fact-finding. As a result, NGO publications funded by the IHL Secretariat erase violations by Hamas and other Palestinian terrorists; dozens, if not hundreds, of Palestinian combatants are falsely characterized as civilians; and no IHL Secretariat-funded NGOs engaged in any systematic analysis of Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians.

The following also mars the IHL Secretariat's work:

- Reflecting an anti-Israel bias and the erasure of the role of Palestinian terror groups, the IHL Secretariat's Annual Report refers to the 2014 war as "The War on Gaza."

- There is no mention of Hamas, other armed groups, rockets, or tunnels in the Annual Report. The Israeli military is referred to as the "**Israeli occupation army.**" The IHL Secretariat cites "2,203 deaths amongst Palestinians," failing to note that hundreds of these were combatants exploiting civilian areas to shield their military operations, were killed by misfired rockets, or were executed as "collaborators."

- The IHL Secretariat also wrote, "The war on Gaza **outstands as the most infamous, significant, and intensive set of HR and IHL violations in terms of scale, destruction and brutality**." Given the current carnage in Syria, Iraq, Sudan, CAR, Somalia, Congo, Ukraine, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere, not to mention the conflicts of the 20th century, this claim borders on the obscene.

- In distributing the "emergency funding," the IHL Secretariat encouraged "all partner CSOs [to] exercise a level of coordination to avoid redundancy, **or worse, contradictions**. Therefore partner CSOs were requested to actively cooperate, cross check data, and **avoid negative overlap**" (81, emphasis added). It is unclear how many omissions or changes were made due to this directive, or how this affected NGO "fact-finding" publications. Nevertheless, the high level of repetitiveness and volume of IHL Secretariat-funded publication suggests that the same claims were packaged by several NGOs in order to flood the UN, governments, and media with dozens of publications, falsely creating a façade of many unique and individual sources of research on the war.

Like the governments of Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, the European Union is also responsible for funding NGOs whose publications on the Gaza war erase the role of Hamas and place exclusive blame for the conflict on Israel, rather than provide professional and objective accounting of events.

For instance, the EU framework known as the European Research Council (ERC) provided funds to the UK-based Forensic Architecture project for a pseudo-scientific "Gaza Platform," an online tool created in partnership with Amnesty International that claims to shed "new light on violations of international law committed" during the war.

The ERC granted an initial €1.2 million in 2011-2015, followed by an additional €150,000, to "principle investigator" Eyal Weizman, a long-time fringe Israeli activist who, prior to this project (and in its results), showed no expertise in the complex methodologies required for discerning details of modern asymmetric warfare against terrorists and of international law.

The Platform repeats standard political bias, which is characterized by the singling out of Israel for condemnation, factual and legal distortions, and the absence of military and legal expertise to draw meaningful conclusions. The Platform utilizes interactive graphics and a slick interface to distract from the lack of substantive fact-finding.

Throughout, the Platform erases the context of individual incidents, including the omission of any details regarding combat between Palestinians and Israeli armed forces. It identifies terrorists as civilian health care workers and parrots other factually inaccurate claims of Palestinian NGOs, without independent verification and even when the accounts are wholly contradictory. Attacks on Israeli civilians, misfired Hamas rockets that killed dozens – if not hundreds of Gazans, and those executed for "collaboration" are ignored. Indeed, Amnesty openly admits the biased objective of the Platform is to "map" only so-called "attacks by Israeli forces".

Instead of presenting independent research, the Platform relies almost entirely on "data" collected by IHL Secretariat-funded NGOs, thereby misleadingly claiming to offer another unique source of information on the war. In other words, the Amnesty project is simply the same bad IHL Secretariat data packaged in interactive form. And like IHL Secretariat-funded NGO publications, the Platform is aimed at entrenching a fraudulent narrative of the Gaza war, where the only side presented as fighting is Israel.

It is no surprise that radical NGO activists, like those funded by the IHL Secretariat and the EU, will exaggerate, distort, and misinform audiences to generate donations and achieve political objectives. What is surprising, however, is that the EU and European governments would misuse taxpayer monies to enable these campaigns.

Substantive fact-finding and professional analysis can be used to facilitate a constructive resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. On the other hand, promotion of propaganda and anti-Israel demonization only serve to maintain conflict and place civilians at risk. European officials need to decide which outcome is preferable.